

THE
Act of Parliament

AGAINST

Religious Meetings,

Proved to be

The Bishops Act:

O R,

A LETTER of the Arch-Bishop
of *Canterbury* to his fellow-Bishops,
to promote the Persecution in-
tended by it.

Printed, to save the trouble of
copying it out.

With some **A N I M A D V E R S I O N S**
thereupon.

Anno Dom. 1670.

For the Right Reverend Father in God, my very good
Lord and Brother, the Lord Bishop of ———

Right Reverend and my very good Lord,

IT hath pleased his Majesty and the two Houses of Parliament, out of their pious care for the welfare of this Church and Kingdom, by making and publishing the late Act for the preventing and suppressing Conventicles, to lay a hopeful way for the peace and settlement of the Church, and the Uniformity of Gods Service in the same; It becomes US the Bishops [as more particularly sensible of the good providence of God] to endeavour as much as in us lies, the promising so blessed a work; And therefore, having well considered what will be fit for me to do in my particular Diocese, I thought fit to recommend the same Confess and Method (which I intend, God willing, to pursue my self) to your Lordship, and the rest of my Brethren the Bishops of my Province, being thereunto encouraged by his Majesties Approbation and expresse Direction in this affair.

Par. 1.

In the first place therefore I advise and require you, that you call before you not only your Chancellors, Archdeacons, Commissaries, Officials, Registrars, and other your Ecclesiastical Officers, but that also by such means, and at such places as you shall judge most convenient, you assemble before you, or some grave and discreet person or persons, your Commissioner or Commissioners, the several Parsons, Vicars and Curats of your Diocese and Jurisdiction, within their several Deanaries; and that you impart to them respectively, as they shall come before you or your Commissioners, the tenore of these my Letters, requiring them and every of them, as well in Mine as in your own Name, that in their several capacities and stations they all perform their duty towards God, the King, and the Church, by an exemplary conformity in their own persons and practice, to his Majesty's Laws, and the Rules of the Church in this behalf.

Par. 2.

I advise that you admonish and recommend to all and every of the Parsons, Vicars and Curates within your Diocese and Jurisdiction, strictness and sobriety of life and conversation, checking and punishing such as transgress, and encouraging such as live orderly; that so they by their virtuous and religious deportment may be themselves patterns of good living to the people under their charge. And next, that you require of

them

them, as they will answer the contrary, that in their own persons in their Churches, they do decently and solemnly perform the Divine Service, by reading the Prayers of the Church, as they are appointed and ordered in and by the Book of Common Prayer, without addition to or diminishing from the same, or varying either in substance or ceremony from the order & method which by the said Book is set down; wherein I hear and am afraid too many do offend; And that in the time of such their officiating they ever make use of and wear their Priestly Habit, the Surplice and Hood, that so by their due and reverend performance of so Holy a Worship they may give honour to God, and by their own Example instruct the people of their Parishes what they ought to teach them in their Doctrine.

Having thus counselled the Ecclesiastical Judges and Officers & the Clergie of your Diocess in their own particular duties, your Lordship is further desired to recommend unto them the care of the people under their respective Jurisdictions and Charges, that in their several places they do their best to persuade and win all Nonconformists and Dissenters to obedience to his Majesties Laws, and unity with the Church; and such as shall be refractory, to endeavour to reduce by the Censures of the Church, or such other good means as shall be most conducing therunto: to which end I advise, that all and every of the said Ecclesiastical Judges and Officers, and every of the Clergie of your Diocess, and the Churchwardens of every Parish, by their respective Ministers, be desired in their respective stations and places, that they take notice of all Nonconformists, Holders, Frequenters, Maintainers, Abettors of Convenicles and unlawful Assemblies, under pretence of Religious Worship, especially of the Preachers and Teachers in them, and of the places wherein the same are held, ever keeping a more watchful eye over the Cities and greater Towns, from whence the mischief is for the most part derived unto the lesser Villages and Hamlets: and wheresoever they find such wilfull Offenders, that then with A Heartly Affection to the Worship of God, the Honour of the King and his Laws, and the Peace of the Church and Kingdom, They do address themselves to the Civil Magistrate, Justices and others concerned, imploring their help and assistance for preventing and suppressing of the same, according to the late said Act in that behalf made and set forth.

And because there may be within the limits of your Diocess some particular or exempt Jurisdictions, belonging either to your Dean, Dean and Chapter, Archdeacons, or to some Ecclesiastical or other persons: I do therefore desire that by such wayes and means as your Lordship shall conceive most proper, you do communicate this my Letter unto them, delivering unto every of them Copies of the same for their better Instruction.

on; and that you require them in My Name, that within their severall Jurisdictions they also pursue the Advices and Directions before set down, as if the same had been given by a particular Letter unto them under my own hand.

Par. 5.

Lastly; That for the better direction to all those who shall be concerned in the Advices given by this Letter, I advise you will give out amongst the Ecclesiastical Officers and your Clergie, as many Copies of the same as your Lordship shall think conducive to the end for which it is designed.

And now, my Lord, what the success will be we must leave to God Almighty; yet (my Lord) I have this confidence under God, That if we do our parts now at first seriously, by Gods help, and the assistance of the Civil Power, [considering the abundant care and provision the Act contains for Our Advantage] We shall within a few monethes see so great an alteration in the distractions of these times, as that the seduced People returning from their seditious and self-seeking Teachers, to the Unity of the Church, and Uniformity of God's Worship, it will be to the Glory of God, the welfare of the Church, the praise of his Majesty and Government, the happiness of the whole Kingdom. And so I bid your Lordship heartily farewell, and am,

My Lord,

Your Lordships most affectionate Friend
and Brother,

Lambeth-house,
May the 7th.
1670.

GILBERT CANT

*A Copy of a Letter from the Archdeacon of Lincoln, to the several
Parishes within his Jurisdiction.*

SIR,

I have received a Command from my Lord Bishop of Lincoln, to disperse Copies of the preceding Letter, to the several Parishes within the Jurisdiction of the Arch-Deaconry of Lincoln. In pursuance therefore of his Lordships Order, I send this to you; Earnestly desiring you to take especial regard to perform whatsoever is therein required of you, either in your own Person, or relating to your Parishioners. And how you shall discharge your duty therein, I shall expect an account at the next Visitation. I am

Your very loving Friend and Brother,

June 7.
1670.

J. CAWLER, Archidiaconus, Lincoln

Some Animadversions upon the foregoing Letter.

IT hath been some matter of Wonder, to many sober and impartial Men, to see that *Gospel Liberty*, which our Lord *Christ* hath purchased for all his Followers, and which in this Nation, by many remarkable Providences, and sad Rebukes, God hath been working (as it were out of the fire) on the behalf of his Innocent and Mistaken People, and which for some years they have been in a peaceable and undisturbed possession of (to the Universal satisfaction of all, that without prejudice have observed their carriage) should now lately of a sudden, and without any provocation given, be ravished from them; and an *Act of Violence* contrived and executed against them, in so precipitate and furious a manner, that (together with their undoubted *Liberty as Christians*) their known *Common Rights as English-men* and *Free-born*, are forcibly taken away; and they, in their Persons and Estates, are exposed to the utmost rapine and malice of all that are willing to destroy and devour them; as if meer difference of opinion had made them the vilest of Malefactors, and, for that, they were utterly to be excluded, from the relief of *Pity* as well as of *Protection*:

After many conjectures about the Rise and Projection of this Mischievous Device, it hath pleased God (who will not suffer the Authors of Iniquity to lie long concealed) to bring it now to light: And in this Letter (*Reader*) thou seest who they are that are called upon to rejoice; as more particularly sensible of the good providence of God therein, and who are earnestly desired, to execute it with utmost Rigor, considering the abundant Care and Provisions that *Act* contains for their Advantage: And these are no less persons, than, *The Right Reverend Fathers in God, our very good Lords, the Lord Bishops*: Persons whose Names and Titles, as they are in this Letter given to them, the Scripture is utterly unacquainted with; and yet they daily boast of their Pedigree, and cry out, as the Jews did of old, *The Church; the Church!* But by no means will they be prevailed with to tell us, what they mean by the *Church*; or who is their *Father*: only we are sure, that God is not; since they have so little resemblance to the *Humility, Patience, Condescension and Meekness* of the Lord *Christ* his Son.

Though these may be accounted *Harsh words*, yet we desire they may be weighed; for we are sure we need go no further than this

Letter

Letter, to justify our selves in using them; Behold here the *Chief of the Bishop's Order*, an *Arch-Bishop*; one who is in Name a *Christian*, in profession a *Protestant*, yet so wholly unconcerned in either of these, that throughout his whole Letter, in matters of the greatest concernment, he makes no mention at all of the *Name of Christ*, (as if he knew he had nothing at all to do with him; but were wholly, as indeed he is, an *Apocryphal Officer*;) And likewise, altogether passing by the *Papists* (as if no Law had ever been made against them, or they had left off to be dangerous) He only fixes a Character of *Odium* upon his *Protestant Brethren*; To persecute and oppose these, he calls a *Pious and Blessed work*, and is so far from bewailing the Calamity that is likely to be brought upon them, and upon the whole Nation for the Injuries done to them, that he stirs up All to help it forward, and to joyn with him in this odious and for ever to be abhorred Employment. All which, though we might ascribe to *Gilbert Shelden*, and make it his personal miscarriage, (of whom we can say, and are ready to prove, That his too little Learning hath made him thus mad) yet we will fix this Violence rather, upon (according to his own stile) *Gilbert Cant.* or, (to speak out his Title in words at length) *Gilbert Archbishop of Canterbury*; who being (as such and in that capacity) *not a creature of God's making*, nor any part of a *Divine Ordinance*, must answer the Darkness of his Original, since the same evil Spirit which begett *Pride* in any, doth likewise instil and direct unto *Civility*, by which that *Pride* may be maintained and upheld.

Concerning this *Prelates Pride*, besides his *Intolerable Title* (which is no small part of that *Name of Blasphemy*, which is more fully and at large written upon his *Father*, the *Pope's forehead*) what need we any other Argument to prove it by, than the base and contemptible stile he useth to those, whom (What ever we think of them) yet he owneth as *Ministers of Christ*? The Apostle *Peter* calls those he writes to, *Elders*, and himself their fellow-*Elder*, 1 Pet. 5. 1. But this *Archbishop* being in a higher *elevation*, and transcendent in his *Priviledges* to any Apostle, looks down with scorn upon his *Brethren*, the *Teachers of the Nation*, and *Parsons, Vicars, Curates* is the best language he can afford them. We wish those poor despised men (many of whom we hope are only mistaken in their way) would a little consider what unworthy Bondage they are under, and what vile drudgery is exacted from them; instead of being *Gospel-Preachers*, they must now turn *State-Informers*, and set up an *Inquisition* to rack and torture their innocent Neighbours, whom it should be their business to convert and save: It is indeed pritty (but too thin a covering at this

time of day) to command them *to be careful of their Lives*, [Pope Par. 3.]
[*Papists* did it to prevent *Luther's Reformation*] and now it is merely
in other words, to devise them to put on *Sheeps clothing* for a time,
that they may play the *Wolves* with the better pretence and greater
advantage.

We may indeed be excused if we seem to wonder, that he did not
(at least for forms sake) devise his *Curates* to preach somewhat more
frequently; but we think it prudently forborn: for why should those
who are so professedly the *Servants of man*, be exhorted so much to
contradict themselves, as to preach *Christ the Lord*? or upon what
pretence of Reason, could this *Arch-Bishop* require, that from others,
which he hath so little care or skill to do himself? Passing by this
Over-sight therefore (wherein he is rightly *Episcopal*) as carrying a
good *decorum* with it, give us leave (*Christian Reader*) to observe on-
ly that we find him in *open terms*, without any *figure*, to call the *Sur-
plice* and *Hood* a *Priestly habit*, enjoining all to wear them in the time Par. 3.
of officiating at *Divine Service*, that so by their *Ordered performance* of
so *Holy a work*, they may give honour to God, and by their own example
instruct the People of their *Parishes*, as they ought to teach them in their
Doctrine. We hope he is serious, and if so, and these things he
would indeed have thus highly esteemed; we need no more to justi-
fy us in our contigned refusal, and utter abhorrence of them:

For, to call any kind of Garments a *Priestly Habit*; to command the
wearing of them, as conducing to the honour of God in his Worship;
and by these to think to instruct the People (which is to make them
not only *significants*, but *teaching Ceremonies*) This is to introduce the
old *Antiquated Jewish Rites and Habits*, which were to be disused
with their Worship: It is to fill the Church of Christ with as many
Inventions, under pretence of *Dicency*, as vain men are pleased to
devise, and wilful men have power to impose; and lastly, it is to
render all *Qualifications* requisite unto the *Ministry*, wholly useless:
For, the *Reading Clerk* of every Parish, or the *Publick Cryers*, may do
all that our *Arch* requires, as well as the ablest and most Learned
Minister.

It will be necessary, before we conclude, to wipe off that slander
wherewith he reproacheth those that joyn with the *Nonconformists*,
calling them *Seduced People*; and their Teachers; *Seditious*, and self- Par. 5.
seekings. In just indignation against which base and unworthy Calum-
ny, we have this to say, That we stand amazed that one, who enjoys
for his own single share, more than would well maintain an hundred
able Preachers with their Families; and yet never did, nor can do
any

any thing in the Person of Christ, to deliver the hundredth part, should venture to charge any man with it. But we know those, who profess themselves the prize of their Conscience, will never seek nor make any inquiry into their own actions. Ps. 101. 2. 4.

And indeed, How can these Preachers be either *Seditious*, or *Self-seeking*, who having often declared, that *Men for their Consciences are not to be imposed upon*; and being under the conviction of that Principle, have quietly suffered the loss of all things, rather than they would deny or forgo it: whereas this unrighteous man, not content with the full enjoyment of his own *Corruption* rather than *Conscience*, will not let his *Brothers* alone; but first procures a Law against them, which he knew before-hand they could not obey, and then seeks to destroy them for not obeying; In which lot we have reason to rejoyce, being used no otherwise than *Danish* was by those, that for his *Integrity* and *Faithfulness* envied him: whose Faith, and the gracious dealing of the Lord with him, as it is on record for his encouragement; so the untimely end of those malicious and crafty Contrivers, we heartily with might seriously be reflected upon by this their grand Imitator.

As for the People being *seduced*, it is a Cavil not worth the answering: for we appeal to the reason of all unprejudic'd men, whether those, who are commanded to follow the *Laws of the King, and of the Church*, with an *implicit faith* and *blind obedience* (as this *Dark Guide* would have them) are not in much more certain danger of being *seduced*, than those who are daily exhorted by their Teachers, to *search the Scripture*, and by that unerring Rule to order their whole Conversation: Which all that ever heard the *Nonconformists* preach, know to be the sum of their Doctrine.

Par. 5.

And now, having thus briefly made out defence, We must (as this *Bishop* faith he doth) *commit the Success to God Almighty*, Believing (which we fear he doth not) that our *Lord Christ*, hath committed to him from the *Father* the Government of the World, as well as of his Church in it, for whose *Sovereignty* and *Supremacy* (according as the *Apostle Paul* hath stated it *Rom. 14. 9, 10.*) we are now contending.

Therefore whilst our Adversaries are directed to seek unto Men for help against us, and rely upon an *Arm of Flesh*; our confidence is in the Name of the Lord, who will in due time bring forth our *Righteousness to light*; and then perhaps this very Man, who now so proudly exalts himself, shall see it, and be ashamed at all his envy. Mich. 7. 9, 10. Isa. 26. 11.